

Social Inclusion, Disability and Environments (SIDE): looking OUT-SIDE for play occupation and children with disabilities

Hólm-dís Fr Methúsalemsdóttir¹, Helen Lynch², Alice Moore²

¹University of Akureyri /Æfingastöðin, Akureyri, Iceland, ²University College Cork, Cork, Ireland

Introduction: Outdoor playspaces are important environments where many children play during childhood. However, outdoor playspaces often do not meet the needs of children with disabilities due to lack of social supports and inadequate planning and design. Numerous barriers exist at a physical, social, and political levels, which may result in the exclusion of many children from outdoor playspaces. This results in a breach of children's right to access outdoor playspaces and subsequently, a breach of children's occupational right to play.

Objectives: Findings from a number of research projects will be used to identify current factors that enable or constrain social inclusion and participation in outdoor playspaces in Ireland.

Methods: Research projects include:

1. Qualitative studies on playspace design in school and community settings
2. Accessibility and Usability of playground environments for children under 12: A scoping review
3. Policy analysis of playground accessibility and usability
4. A survey of occupational therapists' current use of play in paediatric practice in Ireland

Results: Findings to date show that the provision of outdoor playspaces for children with disability has been primarily focused on physical accessibility rather than usability. Furthermore, play occupation seldom features as a goal in Occupational Therapy practice. A playspace analysis tool is being developed to support designing for inclusion OUT-SIDE.

Conclusion: Through establishing this programme of research, it is hoped that discrimination and social exclusion be addressed. Furthermore, through addressing barriers in the physical environment it is hoped that injustices and inequalities that constrain occupational opportunities for play in Ireland be confronted.